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UNITED STATES

Faith and Order Conference Sends "Message to the Churches"

(Oberlin, Ohio) - The first North American Faith and Order Conference ended an eight-day meeting at Oberlin, Ohio, on September 10 with a "message to the churches", calling on every congregation to examine "the way in which it makes visible the nature of the Church of Christ".

The 279 delegates to the conference on "The Nature of the Unity We Seek" asked the churches to share in the discovery they had made of the "solidarities among Christians of the most varied inheritances". (See EPS No. 34.)

Representatives of the 34 U.S. and Canadian Protestant and Anglican churches taking part in the conference endorsed the statement, but representatives of five Eastern Orthodox churches abstained from supporting the message, pointing out that Orthodox members believe that true unity of the Church already exists in Orthodoxy. However, Father Georges Florovsky of the Greek Orthodox delegation and a member of the WCC's Central Committee, pointed out that the Orthodox churches wanted to be "dissociated" only from the particular message and not from the quest for Christian unity and the "ecumenical study process".

The message said in part:

"Gathered to consider the nature of the unity we seek, we give thanks for the unity we have found. This unity not only exists but is entirely the gift of God's grace and love. We are claimed for this unity as we confess with one voice 'while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us', as we acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord; as we accept his commission to declare to all men the good news of his victory.

"This is the Gospel which has ultimate power to shatter the human heart with wonder and shake the world with hope.

"We do not see clearly the path that God has set before us, but we are sure that he is leading us and that at Oberlin he has given us new light. As we have

known a common joy in the unity we now possess, we have also felt a common sorrow over the continuing fact of our separations one from another.

"Although some of our divisions arise out of loyalty to the truth that we now see, we must acknowledge that Christ calls us to a fuller comprehension of truths and more obedient service. To proclaim that Christ is the one Lord is to give him pre-eminence over all else - over our most cherished traditions. This we have not yet done."

The conference represented a new approach to problems of Christian unity, according to the Rt. Rev. Angus Dun, Protestant Episcopal Bishop of Washington, D.C., conference chairman. Preparations have been underway for two years as sixteen regional study groups have prepared questions to be discussed. The conference was called by the U.S. Conference for the World Council of Churches, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. and the Canadian Council of Churches. It was attended by 279 representatives of 39 Christian bodies, 92 consultants and 36 accredited observers. Unofficial observers came from eight other bodies, including the Southern Baptist Church and the Roman Catholic Church.

Conference Delegates Report on Studies

Studies that had been made during the two years of preparation for the conference were presented and became part of the basis for discussion among the twelve study sections at Oberlin.

"Neither clergy nor laity feel any great urge toward organisational unity" despite a wide degree of agreement in faith, according to responses to a check sheet answered by 5,704 Protestant pastors and church members in Minnesota. The questionnaire results showed wide agreement on the nature of the church, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the person of Christ and the ground of salvation. But, the group reported, only 7.8 per cent of the clergy and 11.67 per cent of the laity accept a definition of church unity as meaning "the gathering of all Christians into one visible church organisation". More than 50 per cent of the laity and 36 per cent of the clergy favoured a definition of unity as "a spiritual oneness indifferent to organisational forms but based on agreement as to the fundamentals of Christian faith".

Two other studies presented at the conference showed that despite the variety of denominational positions on baptism, churches exhibit a wide degree of acceptance of the validity of each other's baptism. The mode of baptism, once such a touchy subject, seems to be lessening as a point of contention, the study showed, and emphasis is on the meaning rather than the form.

A fourth study group reported that one of the obstacles to church union is fear on the part of church members that it would result in loss of freedom of local congregations and a reduction in the laity's power in determining church life. But, the report said, church governments, whether episcopal, presbyterian or congregational in form, are strikingly similar in power structures.

Delegates Hear Speeches

During the conference, which opened on September 3, the 279 delegates heard speeches from leading clergymen.

Some of the statements:

"Even our divisions and dissensions, which we are duty bound to overcome, bear witness - sometimes in tortured ways - to God's demand for devotion to truth as well as to man's frequent confusion as to what is true. In Jesus Christ

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we have a new living basis for hope; a new standard and stimulus for a shared life of faith and love, and a new focus for unity came into human existence... The unity we seek is real now. But it is not our possession. It is our source of life and our goal in the mercy of God." - Dr. Robert L. Calhoun, Yale University School professor.

"We have come here to speak and to listen: to be led, to be changed. And if we are deeply changed... we may then become agents of change in our churches. And if this happens, Oberlin will mark the break-through of the ecumenical movement into the broad mid-range of American Christianity, and a much-needed new frontier in our research for unity will have been opened up." - Dr. Albert C. Outler, Southern Methodist University professor.

"Has the Christian way become an institutional rut? Are the lofty goals of the Christian witness, service and mission scaled down to the institutional norms of success?" - Bureaucracy which promotes technical efficiency may also tend "to separate the average church member from the expert who holds the position of legitimate administrative authority. But the world-wide movement for Christian unity, the bureaucrat may forget, is a function of the whole church - not of its clerical and administrative top alone." - Dean Walter Muelder, Boston University School of Religion.

Visser 't Hooft, Lilje Preach

On Sunday, September 8, two European consultants to the conference preached at churches in Oberlin.

Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, said that unity is real in the sense that it is given in the will of God and in His plan. "In another sense it is terribly unreal, for we have obscured it by our divisions. Even though, by the grace of God, we are no longer as isolated from each other as we were and we have the World Council of Churches through which we can give expression to our sense of belonging together, we are far from showing the world that unique unity in faith, in life, in worship and order which is inherent in the Christian Gospel."

Bishop Hanns Lilje of Germany told participants in an ecumenical worship service that "within the last generation, especially since World War II, there has been a steady growth of ecumenical consciousness. In particular this is true of the Christian churches of Europe. It is impossible to retreat behind this line. We dare not ignore the ardent desire of so many plain Christians for a greater, more visible and more effective union of Christians and the Christian churches."

E.P.S., Geneva

UNITED STATES

Moravians Adopt New Statement of Faith

(Bethlehem, Pa.) - Attempts by the former Nazi regime in Germany to eliminate the Old Testament as part of the authoritative Scriptures of the Christian Church have resulted in a change in the Moravian Church's statement of faith.

Delegates to the church's international General Synod (see EPS No. 33) adopted a new statement specifying that both the Old and New Testaments are the sole source of its doctrine. Previously, the denomination's statement mentioned only "the Holy Scriptures" without reference to either the Old or New Testament.

Dr. Heinz Renkewitz of Arnoldshain, Germany, chairman of the synod's committee on doctrine, submitted the statement to the delegates, and said the new wording had been inserted because of Nazi efforts to eliminate the Old Testament.

The new statement also emphasises the Moravian Church's desire for Christian unity and underscores its opposition to racial discrimination. It asserts: "It is the Lord's will that Christendom should give evidence of and seek unity in Him with zeal and love... We confess our share in guilt which is manifest in the severed and divided state of Christendom. By means of such divisions we ourselves hinder the message and power of the Gospel."

The section on race relations states that the Church "recognises no distinction between those who are one in the Lord Jesus Christ".

In another action the Moravians modified their rigid stand against the re-marriage of divorced persons, and urged pastors and congregations dealing with divorced persons wishing to remarry to "make every effort to avoid both a rigid legalism and an irresponsible abuse in the discharge of this sacred responsibility". Under a regulation in effect since 1914 ministers could only remarry the innocent party in a divorce granted for adultery.

The General Synod approved "in principle" the ordination of women. But a spokesman said it was unlikely that this permissive action "will be put to use even in a limited degree". He said women would be ordained by the denomination only if it were "deemed absolutely necessary".

The synod meeting is the first since 1931 and the first ever held in the United States. Normally the general synod is convened every ten years.

E.P.S., Geneva

INDIA

Hindu Mob Burns Down Protestant Mission Centre

(Raipur) - Madhya Pradesh state officials have promised a probe of anti-missionary demonstrations during which a Hindu mob burned down an American Protestant mission community centre valued at \$200,000.

The three-storey modern building was operated by the Evangelical and Reformed Church, working through the United Church of Northern India. Before the fire started all equipment was destroyed, the chapel was desecrated, the Cross demolished and the 5,000-volume library ransacked.

Losses included a dozen typewriters, a large refrigerator, a safe containing \$6,000 and records and documents belonging to 65 different committees.

The trouble apparently developed over the use of an idol in a drama presented on the community centre's stage. The auditorium had been rented by a committee of Hindus for a programme commemorating the centenary of the first Indian uprising against British colonial rule. When an idol was set up on the stage for a dramatic number, the centre's director, the Rev. Gurbachan Singh, objected. Witnesses said he was told by those in charge that "they would see to it". However, the drama went on as scheduled, including the worship scene with the image of Nataraja.

A few days later a Hindu daily paper published statements accusing Mr. Singh of "narrow-mindedness and rude behaviour". The chairman of the Pradesh Congress Committee tried to calm the situation and Mr. Singh put out a handbill explaining his position. The Hindus in charge of the programme informed the local police that Mr. Singh had not been rude to them nor did he try to remove the idol from the stage.

But on August 26 more than 5,000 demonstrators, armed with crowbars and other weapons, arrived at the centre. First all the windows were broken, then the mob broke in and set fire to the building.

Witnesses said that the police and firemen on the scene were helpless to prevent the destruction. Superintendent Singh had to be taken from the building under police escort and the van was stoned as he was driven to the police station.

The six-year-old centre was used by about 500 persons each day and included 50 hostel rooms, a dining room, auditorium, clubrooms, library and bookshop.

Since the incident police have arrested 62 persons on charges ranging from arson to attempted murder. Christians who fled the area have been advised to return by state authorities.

E.P.S., Geneva

INDIA

Transfer of Canadian Mission Property

The United Church of Canada will this year transfer to the Trust Association of the United Church of Northern India more than 200 buildings (churches, schools, colleges, hospitals and residences) which have been built up over 80 years of missionary service in India. (The action parallels the transfer of property by the Presbyterian Church USA to the Church of Christ in Thailand - see EPS No. 31.)

The properties, located in various areas of the central part of India, are estimated to be worth more than \$2,000,000. In announcing this action, the Rev. Dr. D.H. Gallagher, secretary of the United Church's Board of Overseas Mission, said that the transfer of the properties to the Indian Church is the culmination of a long-range policy of the Canadian Board to give more authority to the indigenous church.

"It has been our constant policy to train local church leaders with the hope that some day they would take over the mission work", Dr. Gallagher said. He pointed out that the assistance of some Canadian missionaries will still be needed in India in further training of local church leaders and in assisting them in the missionary work as partners.

E.P.S., Geneva

MIDDLE EAST

Anglican Archbishop Enthroned

The Most Rev. Campbell MacInnes was enthroned as Archbishop in Jerusalem on August 30. (See also EPS No. 8) Church of England sources say that the fact that the new archbishop was able at his enthronement to preach a sermon in Arabic "gave general satisfaction and has received favourable comment in the local press".

Taking part in the ceremony were Anglican workers in Cyprus and Baghdad, the Arab clergy of all the parishes in Lebanon and Jordan, and chaplains of the British congregations in Kuwait, Bahrain, Kirkuk, Basra, Beirut, Tel-Aviv, Haifa and Israeli-Jerusalem. The Archbishop of Gaza was present representing the Greek Orthodox Patriarch; the Armenian Orthodox Patriarch-elect came himself; a Syrian Orthodox Patriarchal vicar, a Russian Orthodox Archimandrite, a Coptic bishop and an Abyssinian abbot walked together in the procession. Also present were Lutheran ministers, a pastor of the Church of Scotland, representatives of the Latin Patriarch and the Franciscan Custodian of the Holy Places, Greek Catholics, Armenian Catholics and a Trappist. Moslem government figures also attended the ceremony.

The new archbishop was installed by Canon Najib Cubain, who has been nominated to become the first Arab bishop of the Anglican Communion in the Middle East. One of the Archbishop's first duties will be to constitute an ecclesiastical synod, comprising the bishops of Egypt and Libya, Sudan and Persia. To these will be added a new diocese of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, which will be ruled by the Arab bishop.

E.P.S., Geneva

SWEDENBrilioth Says Church Must Have Freedom

(Stockholm) - Archbishop Ynve Brilioth told the twenty-seventh biennial convocation of the State Lutheran Church of Sweden that the Church is "not a creation of the State and must have freedom to live its own life". In his opening address to the five-week convocation, the Primate of the Church noted that parliament has been asked to conduct an inquiry into the "forms and foreseeable results" of separating the Swedish Church from the State. The archbishop said that "as far as the Church is concerned" there could be a "more positive approach to such a divorce. However closely the Church is and wants to be allied to the State, the Church is not a creation of the State."

The convocation is expected to debate ten other parliamentary motions affecting the Church, including bills that would permit women to be ordained as ministers, legalise the holding of burial services by laymen and revise the present method of electing local clergymen.

E.P.S., Geneva

GERMANYCommunity Must Be Reunited, Pastor Says

A plea for a new kind of voluntary service that would help citizens become reunited in a real community was sounded by Dr. Eberhard Mueller, director of the Evangelical Academy, Bad Boll, at the annual meeting of German ministers in Marburg.

Dr. Mueller pointed out that the traditional structure of the local community today can no longer counterbalance the loss of contact between the ministers of the community and the people in industry. But, he warned, Christians must not retreat and defend positions of unwordly piousness. Instead, he urged them to cooperate in developing new voluntary services that would draw the community members together. He cited Christian working committees as an example of a project that gave people with little or no contact with the churches the chance to discuss problems with small groups of Christians. "We are probably living in the biggest transformation process which human society has ever experienced", Dr. Mueller said. Only a cooperating church will be able to cope effectively with the implications of this change, he added.

"The Church in a Transformed World" was the general theme of the meeting, which was also attended by 100 ministers of the German Democratic Republic. Bishop Jaenicke of Magdeburg in the DDR said Christians there feel themselves called to proclaim the Gospel in a transformed world and to counteract materialism and self-destruction by their witness. Eighty per cent of the youths in the DDR attend catechism and confirmation classes, he added, indicating their refusal to accept atheistic teachings and a clear confession of their Christian faith.

E.P.S., Geneva

MADAGASCARUnited National Church Foreseen in Two Years

Conversations between Protestant missions in Madagascar, looking toward the formation of a united national Madagass church are making headway, according to Mr. Jean Lequerre Rajoelisolo, the editor of the bilingual (French/Madagass) weekly paper, "Fanasia".

During a recent visit in Geneva, he said that it is hoped the united church will be formed in about two years. A negotiating committee, at work for four years, reached agreement on matters of principle last year and is now studying

questions concerning the structure of the future church, he said. A third of the committee members are missionaries and two-thirds are Madagass.

More than a million of the five million inhabitants of Madagascar are Protestant and a million are Roman Catholics.

Missions working in Madagascar include the London Mission (the first to arrive in the country), the Quakers, the Norwegian Lutheran Mission, the Mission of Paris (Reformed) and an Anglican and two American missions. E.P.S., Geneva

UNITED STATES

Inter-American Youth Visits

Delegates to the general council meeting of the United Christian Youth Movement, youth arm of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., have voted to invite a team of Protestant youth from Central and South America to visit North American churches in 1959.

At the same time the group decided to convene a special conference of 3,000 North American young people in August, 1961. The conference will be a follow-up of the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches, scheduled for "around Christmas", 1960, in Ceylon.

The council also voted to conduct a campaign to inform Christian youth of the alternatives to regular military service. The action was based on a study which, a report to the meeting said, showed that many Christians in the United States do not wish to participate in war or learn how to conduct warfare. Among the alternatives mentioned were non-combatant military service and civilian service in health, social welfare and agricultural projects. E.P.S., Geneva

UNITED STATES

German Union Churches Want Closer Relations with the United Church

Leaders of the Evangelical Church of the Union (EKU) in Germany have met in the United States with officials of the newly-formed United Church of Christ and proposed "closer fraternal relations" between the two bodies, including inter-communion.

The United Church of Christ was formed last June by a merger of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Churches (see EPS No. 26).

At its recent council meeting, the Evangelical Church of the Union decided to promote closer contacts with "united" churches in other countries. In Germany the Church of the Union has about 14,000,000 members, about 90 per cent of them Lutheran and 10 per cent Reformed. It comprises six united churches which are members of the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD).

At the meeting in the United States the German churchmen suggested the following programme: a reciprocal declaration of intercommunion and of the mutual recognition of each other's ministries and sacraments; an exchange of fraternal delegates at general synod meetings; an exchange of professors in theological seminaries of the two groups; an exchange of theological students.

E.P.S., Geneva

YMCA Movements Report Advances

Bishop Chandu Ray is the recently-elected president of the National Council of YMCAs of Pakistan. The organisation has been recognised by the government as a corporate body, and last July was accepted by the World Council of YMCAs as a member movement of the World Alliance. Squadron-Leader Charles M. Revis has been elected national general secretary. Officials report that the long-established YMCAs of Lahore and Karchi are planning to expand into other cities of West and East Pakistan.

Three other YMCAs were accepted as associates of the World Alliance at the meeting of the World Council of YMCAs in Kassel, Germany, this summer (see EPS No. 28). They are the recently-formed National Alliance of YMCAs of Lebanon, which unites associations in Beirut and Tripoli, the YMCA of Bangkok and the Alliance of YMCAs of the French Cameroons.

E.P.S., Geneva

In Brief

The government of the African state of Ghana has again expelled two tribal chiefs because of alleged defiance of the law. Two Moslem leaders had already been expelled on August 24. The Christian Council of Ghana at that time sent a letter of protest to Prime Minister Nkrumah requesting the abolition of the Deportation Law (see EPS No. 33). In replying, Dr. Nkrumah said there was nothing new in the bill and that it was "based on the precedent of previous ordinances of deportation which it had unfortunately been necessary to enact from time to time".

* *

The Christian Literature Society in Ceylon has become an independent body, and, along with the National Christian Council, is setting up a new publishing plan. Bookshops in the island have been consolidated and strengthened, officials report. The society is maintaining a close working relationship with the United Society for Christian Literature with headquarters in London. New secretary of the society is the Rev. C.H. Ratnaike, who is also general secretary of the National Christian Council.

* *

The Ambokavango Church in the Finnish mission fields in Ovamboland and the Okavango areas has been registered by the South African government as an independent church body. The membership of the church is 95,000, and it has 44 native pastors and 873 other full-time African workers.

* *

The Ecumenical House at the University of Heidelberg, the first specifically ecumenical student residence in Germany, accepts students and teachers who are "vitally concerned with an ecumenical contact with members of churches other than their own". Life in the house focuses on morning and evening worship according to the practice of the various churches represented, and there are weekly discussions.

* *

The Lutheran parishes in Helsinki, Finland, have published a picture book on church life in the city. An edition of "The Church in a Growing City" has been prepared with an English introduction and text.

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During sessions of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., largest Negro religious body in the United States, four downtown "white" hotels in Louisville, Kentucky, accepted convention delegates as guests. It was believed to be the first time that the city's downtown hotels had housed Negroes in such numbers.

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A Negro clergyman in Birmingham, Alabama, the Rev. F.L. Shuttlesworth, was beaten early this month when he tried to enrol his daughter and other Negro children in an all-white high school. Three white men were arrested after this incident.

* *

Patriarch Alexius of Moscow is to visit the Serbian Patriarch Vikentije in Yugoslavia in response to an official invitation from the Serbian Orthodox Patriarchate. He will travel with 12 dignitaries of the Russian Orthodox Church.

* *

An American film company has made a documentary film on the Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, Minneapolis 1957. It will be ready for performance in January 1958 with English, German and Scandinavian sound tracks.

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The foundation stone has been laid for a new church in Voelkemarkt in Austria, following an ecumenical youth work camp this summer. The basement and foundations are the first stage of a building to replace barracks given in 1949 by the member churches of the World Council of Churches.

* *

In many Roman Catholic churches in France memorial services have been held again this year for the victims of the Saint Bartholomew's Eve massacre 385 years ago. The suggestion for the annual memorial services, which have been held since 1937, came from the late Abbé Paul Couturier of Lyons who, throughout his life, interceded for mutual understanding between the Christian confessions.

* *

The government of Argentina has rescinded an order given by the former Péron government prohibiting, "for reasons of security", the erection of non-Roman Catholic churches in districts on the Argentinian frontiers.

E.P.S., Geneva

